

Liberia: 1989-1997 Civil War, Post-War Developments, and U.S. Relations

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Summary

This report covers Liberia's first civil conflict (1989-1997), post-war developments until roughly 2001, and the history of U.S.-Liberian relations and U.S. policy toward Liberia. Subsequent, more recent events are covered in CRS Report RL32243, *Liberia: Transition to Peace*.

The modern Liberian state was founded by "Americo-Liberians," black freemen and former slaves from the Americas who settled in Liberia beginning in 1821. State structure and society in contemporary Liberia reflect a blending of indigenous and Americo-Liberian cultural and political influences, but the latter historically exercised extensive control over Liberia's economy and central government. Americo-Liberian rule persisted until December 1989, when after nearly a decade under the corrupt rule of Samuel K. Doe, who seized power in a 1980 coup, Liberia plunged into civil war. Factional conflict raged for 7 years, despite the signing of multiple peace agreements, the presence of U.N. observers, and the deployment of a regional intervention force dispatched by the Economic Community of West African States. The conflict caused between 150,000 and 200,000 deaths, and displaced much of the population. The warring factions committed numerous atrocities and forcibly enlisted thousands of children as fighters. Throughout the conflict, Congress and successive administrations provided humanitarian assistance for the Liberian people. The United States had been Liberia's leading pre-war trading partner and a major aid donor. A peace process, initiated in mid-1996, resulted in the July 19, 1997 election of former faction leader Charles Taylor as president of Liberia.

As the new government began the tasks of reconstruction and reconciliation, Liberia appeared to have entered a period of normalcy. The killing and harassment of prominent opposition leaders and the new administration's closure of a newspaper and radio stations, however, raised widespread doubts about its commitment to good governance and support for basic human rights. Such incidents prompted strong expressions of U.S. and international concern, but reports of human rights abuses, corruption, and lack of democratic progress under the Taylor administration persisted, as did criticism of it. International concern, particularly in 1999 and subsequently, increasingly centered on the Taylor government's on-going military assistance to the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels fighting neighboring Sierra Leone's government. This aid, which Taylor denied providing, notably involved the exchange of military aid for diamonds from Sierra Leone and prolonged its conflict. To counter these actions, the U.S. and other governments supported a series of U.N. Security Council resolutions aimed at ending the trade in "conflict diamonds" and sanctioning the Taylor government. The United States also pursued unilateral sanctioning the Taylor government.

Eventually, poor political and human rights conditions and residual civil war resentments and rivalries gave rise to series of limited armed incursions into Liberia by anti-Taylor dissidents in 1999, who continued their efforts in the following year, giving rise to a broad and sustained armed insurgency that eventually developed into a second full-scale civil war (covered in CRS Report RL32243, as noted above).

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General Background

In 1821, groups of African Americans established colonial settlements in Liberia, a small West African country, with the assistance of the American Colonization Society (ACS). In 1847, the legislature of the settler colony declared the territory an independent, free republic—the first on the African continent. The legislature named the new country Liberia and elected as its first president Joseph Jenkins Roberts.

Until 1980, Liberia, which modeled its constitution after that of the United States, remained independent and stable, but conflict over political power and economic resources between descendants of settlers and indigenous groups was present from the birth of the republic. Liberian state and society reflect a blending of the cultural and political influences of both populations. The indigenous population is comprised of 16 main ethnic groups who speak 27 languages or distinct dialects. Americo-Liberians, who include the descendants of African-American settlers from the United States and “Congos,” those descended from

Caribbean freed slaves and captives rescued from illegal slave ships interdicted at sea, make up about 5% of the population. Also resident in Liberia are small numbers of foreign-born Liberians, primarily of Middle Eastern and European descent, and non-Liberian African immigrants.

Liberia in Brief

Size: 43,000 sq. mi. Slightly larger than Tennessee
Population: 3.22 million (2003 est.)
Population growth rate: 1.67% (2003)
Gross National Income (GNI): \$.49 billion (2002)
GNI per Capita: \$150 (2002)
External Debt: \$2.8 billion (2003)
Major Exports: Timber, rubber, iron ore, diamonds, cocoa, coffee
Languages: English 20% (official), 28 indigenous languages/dialects
Key Ethnic Groups: Indigenous ethnic groups, 95% (Bassa, Bella, Dei, Gbandi, Gio, Gola, Grebo, Kissi, Kpelle, Krahn, Kru, Loma, Mandingo, Mano, Mende, Vai); Americo-Liberians 2.5% (descendants of U.S. freed slaves and freemen); and Congo People 2.5% (descendants of Caribbean ex-slaves).
Religions: 40% indigenous beliefs, 40% Christian/Christian-indigenous beliefs, Muslim 20%.
Literacy: Male, 73.3%; Female, 41.6% (2003)
Under-5 Mortality rate: 235 deaths/1,000 live births (2001).
Life Expectancy, years at birth: 48.15 (2003)
HIV-positive adults (percent of population): 9% (2001).
Sources: CIA *World Factbook* 2001; USAID; World Bank *Development Indicators*; *Ethnologue.com*; United Nations.

Americo-Liberian Rule

A small, Americo-Liberian-dominated elite historically exercised strong control over Liberian politics and economic life, often at the cost of the indigenous population. The former group traditionally predominated in the urban, modern economy, while about 80% of the latter group engaged primarily in subsistence agriculture and petty trade and generally experienced lower standards of living. Such unequal social relations were an effect both of Liberia’s American settlement history, and of Africa’s colonial era more generally. In the late 19th century, European colonial powers increased the political and territorial extent of their rule across Africa, commonly moving gradually inland from coastal commercial settlements or military bases. This pattern of occupation was increasingly formalized after 1885, when European governments met and mutually agreed that any colonizing state would have to “effectively occupy” and map out

African regions over which it claimed sovereignty.¹ In accordance with this model of rule, and during the same period, the Americo-Liberian elite began to impose a system of centralized administrative rule, taxation, and codified law over the small, decentralized indigenous confederations and independent clan or village-based societies of Liberia's interior, often employing military force (covered further below).

Doe Regime

Americo-Liberian rule came to an abrupt end in 1980, when a groups of low-ranking military officers led by 28-year old Master Sergeant Samuel K. Doe staged a violent military coup, toppling the government of William Tolbert. Doe and his associates formed a ruling body called the People's Redemption Council (PRC). During the coup, President Tolbert was murdered, and the PRC later had opponents executed. Americo-Liberian politicians and former Tolbert administration officials were especially targeted for violent actions of reprisal, notable among which was the public execution on a Monrovia beach of a group of Tolbert's ministers at the order of a PRC tribunal. Doe's government was the first to be headed by a Liberian of indigenous ethnic descent. The PRC initially received broad support for advocating socio-economic advancement for all indigenous Liberians and a radical political reform agenda. Doe and the PRC ruled by decree until 1984, when a new constitution was passed by referendum, leading to elections in 1985. Doe won the poll, which was widely believed to have been fraudulent. Increasingly, Doe's security forces coercively repressed political party rivals and journalists. Coup attempts in 1985 and 1988 by military leaders with bases of support in Nimba County, populated mainly by the Gio and Mano ethnic groups, led to violent reprisals by the Doe administration against these populations. By 1989, Doe's government had become infamous for its economic mismanagement and venality, brutality, and ethnic bias, primarily in favor of the Krahn and Mandingo ethnic groups. His administration bankrupted Liberia, eventually alienated the United States—which had long been a strong supporter and close ally of Liberia, and supported Doe during the first half of his tenure—and embittered Liberians from outside his ethnic support base, causing widespread opposition to his rule.

Civil War, 1989-1997

On December 24, 1989, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), led by Charles Taylor, crossed into Liberia from Cote d'Ivoire, sparking a conflict that mushroomed into a seven year civil war. Taylor, then 51 years old, had studied economics in the United States, and had been active in the U.S. Liberian community until his return to Liberia shortly after the 1980 military coup. Taylor fled to the United States in 1983 to escape a criminal probe by Liberian authorities in relation to his reported embezzlement of nearly \$1 million while serving as a deputy minister in the Doe government. In response to a Liberian government request for his extradition, he was arrested in May 1984 in Massachusetts. In September 1985, however, Taylor escaped from prison, along with four convicted felons, while his deportation hearing proceedings were pending.

Growth of Factions

The hostilities initiated by the NPFL spawned other armed factions. Doe was captured and murdered in September 1990 by the Independent NPFL, an NPFL breakaway faction led by a

¹ On this period, see Thomas Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa, 1876-1912*, 1st U.S. ed., New York: Random House, 1991; and John M. MacKenzie, *The Partition of Africa, 1880-1900 and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century*, New York: Methuen, 1983, *inter alia*.

battle commander called Prince Johnson. A video of Doe's brutal execution subsequently circulated widely in Liberia. An ethnically-mixed group of NPFL opponents, led by a group of predominantly Krahn former officers of the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL), called the Liberian United Defense Force, emerged in 1991. It later formed an alliance with a small Mandingo-dominated group, giving birth to the United Liberation Movement of Liberia (ULIMO). In 1993 ULIMO split, giving birth to ULIMO-K, a Mandingo-dominated faction led by Alhaji Kromah, a former Ministry of Information official, and ULIMO-J, a Krahn-dominated group led by Roosevelt Johnson, a former Ministry of Finance official. The two factions engaged in periodically heavy fighting against one another. Other key factions included politician George Boley's Liberia Peace Council (LPC), and the remnants of the AFL, led by General Hezekiah Bowen. Several smaller factions—including the Bong Defense Front; the Lofa Defense Force, which itself split into pro- and anti-NPFL elements; and the Central Revolutionary Council (CRC-NPFL), a breakaway faction of the NPFL—were also active in the conflict. The factions tended to be unstable; combatants and their leaders were known to change sides according to shifting local security conditions, changing tactical and political alliances, financial inducements, and opportunities to loot or trade.

ECOMOG

In August 1990, the 16-member Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) agreed, though not unanimously, to deploy a joint military intervention force, the Economic Community Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), and place it under Nigerian leadership. The mission later included troops from non-ECOWAS countries, including Uganda and Tanzania. ECOMOG's objectives were to impose a cease-fire; help Liberians establish an interim government until elections could be held; stop the killing of innocent civilians; and ensure the safe evacuation of foreign nationals. ECOMOG also sought to prevent the conflict from spreading into neighboring states, which share a complex history of state, economic, and ethno-linguistic social relations with Liberia.

Once in Liberia, the Nigeria-dominated ECOMOG force adopted a strategy of attempting to defeat Taylor's NPFL, seen by some observers as the most dangerous and recalcitrant of the factions. ECOMOG was plagued by a host of problems, including political differences between the member nations of ECOWAS; lack of operational resources and related difficulties; allegations of corruption concerning some ECOMOG forces, particularly certain Nigerian elements; and the formation of unofficial and covert political and economic alliances with the armed Liberian factions. ECOMOG was, however, able to stabilize Monrovia from 1990 through 1995, while Taylor's forces, headquartered in the north-central town of Gbarnga (*baa-n-ga*), and the LPC controlled much of the central and south-eastern countryside.

Conflict Resolution Process

Beginning in November 1990, the factions signed numerous cease-fire and demobilization agreements that focused on creating a transition to civilian rule, but none was effective until 1995. The factions refused to disarm and vied for influence in transitional coalitions, violent conflict erupted anew, and scheduled elections were canceled because of continued fighting.²

² Key agreements included the Bamako Cease-fire Agreement (November 1990); the Yamassoukro Accord (October 1991); the Cotonou Agreement (July 1993); the Akosombo Agreement (September 1994); Accra Agreement (a.k.a. Akosombo II, December 1994); the Abuja Accord (August 1995); and Abuja II (August 1996). Most of these agreements set cease-fire conditions and provided for the establishment of transitional power structures. In some cases,

On September 22, 1993, the United Nations (U.N.) Security Council established the U.N. Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL). It later deployed 368 military observers and associated civilian personnel in early 1994 to monitor implementation of the abortive Cotonou Peace Agreement, prior to elections originally planned for February/March 1994. Renewed armed hostilities, however, broke out in May 1994 and continued, becoming especially intense in July and August. ECOMOG, and later UNOMIL, members were captured and held hostage by some factions. By mid-1994, the humanitarian situation had become disastrous, with 1.8 million Liberians in need of humanitarian assistance. Conditions continued to deteriorate, but humanitarian agencies were unable to reach many in need due to hostilities and general insecurity.

Factional leaders agreed in September 1994 to the Akosombo Agreement, a supplement to the Cotonou agreement, named after the Ghanaian town where it was signed, but the security situation in Liberia remained poor. In October 1994, in the face of ECOMOG funding shortfalls and a lack of will by the Liberian combatants to honor agreements to end the war, the Security Council reduced to about 90 the number of UNOMIL observers. It extended UNOMIL's mandate, however, and subsequently extended it several times until September 1997.

In December 1994, the factions and other parties signed the Accra Agreement, a supplement to the Akosombo Agreement, but disagreements ensued and fighting continued. Various conflict resolution efforts led to the ratification in August 1995 of a peace agreement known as the Abuja Accord, after the Nigerian capital where it was signed by seven faction leaders and civilian representatives. The agreement followed several months of concerted ECOWAS conflict negotiation efforts led by Ghana and Nigeria. The main point of contention had been the composition of the proposed transitional government, the Council of State. On August 31, however, three civilian representatives and the three main rebel leaders—Taylor, Kromah, and Boley—were sworn in. ULIMO-J leader Roosevelt Johnson was given the defense portfolio. The Council, chaired by Wilton Sankawulo, a professor, was tasked with implementing the cease-fire agreement, demobilizing all combatants, and holding presidential elections in August/September 1996.

1996: Conflict, Cease-fire, and Disarmament

A great deal of optimism followed the August 1995 Abuja Accord, and the humanitarian situation improved moderately, but several skirmishes occurred in its wake, leading to heavy fighting in late 1995. Sustained fighting broke out again in early April 1996, after the Council of State attempted to arrest faction leader Roosevelt Johnson, who was also minister of rural development, on murder charges. For seven weeks, fighting—mainly between Taylor's NPFL and Johnson's ULIMO-J and allied factions—raged in Monrovia. Fighters from both factions looted homes, businesses, government offices, and international aid organizations. Tens of thousands of Liberians fled their homes to escape the fighting, and as many as 20,000 sought refuge in the U.S. embassy's Greystone compound. U.S. military helicopters evacuated 2,400 Americans and other foreign nationals to Freetown, Sierra Leone.

On April 29, after holding talks in Ghana, then-U.S. Assistant Secretary for African Affairs George Moose traveled to Monrovia in an attempt to persuade the militia leaders to attend a planned May 8 summit meeting of West African states in Accra, Ghana to discuss salvaging the Abuja Accord, but his attempts to contact Taylor and Kromah were unsuccessful. The following day, after shots were directed at the U.S. embassy, U.S. Marine guards returned fire, killing three

they spawned ancillary working agreements. Factions and political parties also formed informal alliances and agreements.

gunmen. One day later, a U.S. amphibious battle group, consisting of four U.S. Navy warships carrying 2,200 marines, arrived in Monrovia harbor to discourage a possible attack on the embassy.

Role of ECOWAS

On May 16, 1996, a member of Liberia's Council of State, George Boley, stated that the Council had not met to determine whether it should arrest Krahn leader Roosevelt Johnson—the event which had touched off two months of fighting and looting. Boley, a Johnson ally, argued that the move was a “ploy” designed by Taylor and Kromah to eliminate Johnson as a political force. ECOMOG began to re-assert control over parts of Monrovia in mid-May, and a fragile peace was restored in Liberia when, on May 26, the factions agreed to a cease-fire. Following the cease-fire accord, ECOMOG increased its deployment of troops throughout Monrovia, and forces loyal to Taylor's NPFL and Kromah's ULIMO-K withdrew from the city.

By early August 1996, most Liberian refugees had left the American embassy compound. On August 17th, an ECOWAS committee met to discuss the situation in Liberia, and agreed to extend the 1995 Abuja Accord to June 15, 1997. The group also called for the disarmament of militia members by January 1997, to be followed by elections in late May 1997, and strongly urged its members and other countries not to supply arms to Liberian fighters. Perhaps its most practical and effective action—and a significant indication of regional resolve to end the chaos in neighboring Liberia—was to warn faction leaders that if they interfered with the peace implementation process they would face personal sanctions and possible trial as war criminals.

At the August ECOWAS meeting, Liberia's Council of State also made significant progress. It not only achieved a reconciliation, but also determined to restore Council member Roosevelt Johnson to a ministerial post (the Transportation portfolio), and unanimously elected Ruth Sando Perry, a former senator, as Council president. Ms. Perry was sworn in on September 3, thus becoming the African continent's first female head of state. In addition, humanitarian organizations were able to renew delivery of limited assistance in various regions of the country.

UNOMIL's mandate was extended twice, in March and June, 1997. On August 30, the U.N. Security Council agreed to extend by three months its observer mission in Liberia, and accepted Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali's proposal to raise the number of observers by 24; there were just 10 in the country at the time. Inter-factional violence, however, followed the peace agreement reached in August. On October 31, gunmen tried but failed to assassinate Charles Taylor, but during the attempt, three of Taylor's chief aides were killed. Public insecurity remained widespread; in several incidents, traders and other civilians were murdered while traveling.

Disarmament and the Transition to Peace

Despite continued violent incidents, on November 22, 1996 the factions began turning over their weapons to UNOMIL and ECOMOG peacekeepers. Food, clothing, and scholarships were offered as incentives to fighters to disarm. It was widely suspected that the various factions had buried weapons caches for later use, but the disarmament eventually brought in a significant number of weapons. During the official disarmament period of November 22, 1996 to February 9, 1997, over 41,000 fighters, including over 4,000 child combatants, reportedly disarmed; over 9,500 weapons and 1.2 million pieces of ammunition were also surrendered.

As the disarmament process proceeded, the ECOMOG force, previously dominated by Nigeria, was reinforced and broadened, when in early 1997 other countries committed additional troops. In February, the United States undertook Operation Assured Lift; the U.S. military mission

transported 1,160 ECOMOG troops and equipment to Liberia. U.S. transport aircraft, based in Germany, ferried Malian, Ivorian, and Ghanaian peacekeepers from their home countries to Monrovia. This logistical assistance was intended as a signal of U.S. support for the peace process. European donor members of the U.S.-led International Contact Group on Liberia provided transport defrayment costs and equipment for the effort. The ECOMOG force was again increased in April, with the arrival of troops from Niger, Burkina Faso, and Benin.

ECOWAS and Election Planning

ECOWAS foreign ministers met in February 1997 to assess the status of disarmament, and determined that the effort had largely succeeded and that the elections should take place, as planned, on May 30. Large weapons caches were discovered in March and April, however, and some human rights groups expressed skepticism about the relative success of the demobilization process. They urged that elections not be held until ECOMOG and other actors could guarantee a free and fair vote, through such actions as continuing the disarmament effort, encouraging refugees to return, and ensuring safe polling places. On April 14, Liberia's Roman Catholic bishops also called for a postponement, arguing that more time was needed for voter repatriation, registration, and education.

A special ECOWAS summit, held in Abuja in mid-May 1997, decided to postpone Liberia's elections until July 19, with the new government to be installed on August 2. In early July, 12 out of Liberia's 13 political parties—Charles Taylor's party was the sole holdout—urged that the vote be delayed further. ECOWAS did not agree. Because ECOMOG had pledged to remain in Liberia for six months after the elections, Nigeria and other countries were anxious for elections to be held as early as possible.³ The United States and other western donor states also wanted the Liberian elections to proceed as scheduled. Liberia's independent election commission denied the plea for a postponement.

The 1997 Elections and the Taylor Presidency

Charles Taylor was among the first declared candidates for the presidency. In early May, Taylor publicly launched the campaign of his National Patriotic Party (NPP), formed following the dissolution of the NPFL in January 1997, in defiance of an independent election commission ban on electioneering and before any of the other candidates had begun to campaign. He argued that the country needed a "strong leader." He drew much rural support, but the urban Monrovia electorate divided its support among the eleven other candidates. Multiple candidates, including three former warlords and several former cabinet ministers under the toppled Doe government, contested the election. The main challenger to Taylor, however, was Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, a Harvard-educated former U.N. executive and businesswoman.

Charles Taylor was proclaimed the winner of the July 19 poll, with 75.3% of the vote. By most accounts, the election—the country's first in 12 years—was peaceful, and voter registration and turnout rates were high. Between 700,000 and 750,000 Liberians registered to vote—a substantial figure, given that many people had fled the country or were displaced internally. Election day turnout was estimated at nearly 90%. Roughly 500 international electoral observers were on hand, including 330 from the U.N., groups from the European Union (EU) and the Organization of African Unity (OAU), and a team led by former President Jimmy Carter. Initially, candidate

³ This position was underlined by ECOMOG's need to dispatch some of its 13,000-strong force in Liberia to Sierra Leone, in order to contend with a May 25 putsch that toppled the elected government in neighboring Sierra Leone. ECOMOG strongly opposed the coup, both politically and militarily, particularly in light of the existence of political-military relations between the Liberian factions, notably Taylor's NPFL, and armed actors in Sierra Leone.

Johnson-Sirleaf complained of fraud and other irregularities, but international election monitors did not concur with her claims. Mr. Carter and spokesmen for EU, U.N., and OAU observers all characterized the vote as generally free, fair, and peaceful. Johnson-Sirleaf, who had termed the results “statistically impossible,” later said she would present “a strong and constructive opposition.”

Taylor won his substantial electoral victory despite his well-known role in launching the civil war and fomenting bloodshed in Liberia over the preceding 7 years. Several possible reasons have been offered for this ostensibly counter-intuitive outcome. Taylor, described as a charismatic figure, had the biggest campaign war chest; controlled extensive media resources, including the country’s only radio station; and was the best organized contender. Taylor’s campaign workers also reportedly enticed Liberian refugees resident in neighboring Ivory Coast to cross into Liberia to cast their votes for him in exchange for food and money, and transportation to polling stations was reportedly provided by vehicles owned by Taylor. Many Liberians reportedly believed that a vote for Taylor was a vote for peace and stability; many feared that Taylor, as head of the largest armed faction, might continue to fight for power if he was not elected. Liberians reportedly explained their choice with the slogan that referred to Taylor: “You kill my pa, you kill my ma, I will vote for you.” Many also agreed with Taylor’s claim that Liberia needed a “strong leader,” particularly given events in neighboring Sierra Leone, which had also faced civil war throughout the 1990s, after its elected president was deposed in May 1997 by a group of disaffected junior officers.

In light of his past conduct, the prospect of a Taylor presidency was disturbing to many Liberians and foreign observers; some argued that Taylor’s leadership might undermine external assistance and investment. The possibility of renewed violence also concerned some observers. Taylor had made many enemies during the conflict, and although many fighters had been demobilized, the ECOWAS peacekeeping force, known as ECOMOG, continued to discover large arms caches well after the disarmament deadline.

Relations with ECOMOG

The Taylor government’s post-war relationship with ECOMOG, the ECOWAS intervention force, was uneasy and sometimes tense. The Taylor government initially claimed that it wanted ECOMOG to remain in Liberia to ensure security, but serious disputes occurred over ECOMOG’s post-conflict role. ECOMOG’s effort to counter the 1997 coup in Sierra Leone was a major source of friction between ECOWAS and Taylor. When Sierra Leonean junta leader Johnny Paul Koroma attempted to flee Sierra Leone in February 1998, ECOMOG aircraft forced his helicopter to land in Liberia. Taylor objected to the action, labeling it a violation of Liberian sovereignty. Shortly thereafter, an ECOMOG jet fighter made several low passes over Monrovia, and Liberia recalled its ambassador to Nigeria in protest, but Taylor later reportedly consulted with other Liberian leaders and decided not to pursue the issue. In mid-March 1998, however, several Nigerian journalists and a defense official, en route home from Sierra Leone, were arrested in Monrovia on drug charges and released only after ECOMOG intervened. In early May 1998, ECOMOG announced it had captured dozens of Liberians fighting for the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), a group of rebels then fighting the government of Sierra Leone.⁴ Taylor, however, disavowed any Liberian government ties to the RUF and called for all Liberian combatants in Sierra Leone to return home.

In October 1998, Liberia closed its western border with conflict-beset Sierra Leone after dispatching 1,000 troops to the area. The deployment was sharply criticized by ECOMOG’s

⁴ See CRS Report RL31062, *Sierra Leone: Transition to Peace*.

commander, General Malu. Taylor was dismissive of such concerns, asserting that Liberia's constitution granted his government authority to deploy military force to protect the country's borders. As the Sierra Leone conflict heated up, ECOMOG began to move its troops into Sierra Leone. Relations between ECOMOG and the Taylor government remained rocky; ECOMOG leaders accused Taylor of supporting the RUF militarily. Most ECOMOG troops had been withdrawn from Liberia by late 1998, but a small force remained in Liberia in 1999. In July 1999, remaining ECOMOG troops supervised the destruction of weapons turned in during the disarmament process, which ended in late 1999. In October 1999, ECOMOG began a rapid withdrawal of its remaining 1,000 troops, marking the end of ECOMOG's presence in Liberia.

Post-War Transitional Period

President Taylor's first cabinet included family members and a former rival warlord. To get the nation's finances on track, his government announced that it would reintroduce the U.S. dollar as the country's currency; submitted a stop-gap budget; and met with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the African Development Bank to develop a sound economic program, to which the EU also pledged support. The new government also sought support from diverse foreign governments.

Notwithstanding concerns about stability after the election, there were many signs of progress and normalcy in Liberia. In August 1997, ECOMOG lifted a shipping embargo imposed in 1993, restoring an important source of revenue to the country. Seaports and airports reopened, providing communication and goods transportation links with the outside world. At the end of the month, UNOMIL personnel began to depart, but the U.N. maintained a presence in Liberia. In December 1997, it established the U.N. Peace-building Support Office in Liberia (UNOL) to assist in the consolidation of peace, national recovery and reconstruction, and the creation of democratic structures.

The Humanitarian Situation

The civil war claimed a high toll on non-combatants. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) estimated that during the war at least 740,000 of Liberia's pre-war 2.5 million inhabitants became refugees, that 1.2 million became internally displaced persons (IDPs), and that between 150,000 and 200,000 persons—and possibly as many as 300,000—were killed or maimed as a direct result of the civil war. The war drastically reduced rural food production and cut off international trade, causing hunger and widespread malnutrition. It was not until ECOMOG occupied Monrovia in mid-1990 that foreign humanitarian assistance was able to reach the population. In 1994, the food situation in rural areas again deteriorated. Fighting forced farmers to leave fields unharvested, and humanitarian relief agencies abandoned many areas, following the looting of their supplies and other disruptions. In 1996, fighting in Monrovia again resulted in the theft and destruction of non-governmental organizations' (NGO) supplies and equipment. During the war, countless human rights abuses and atrocities were committed against civilians, often along ethnic lines, and many children were used as fighters by most of the factions. Although large-scale combat ended in early 1997, widespread suffering continued; for months, relief organizations discovered pockets of starving people. Thousands of non-combatants, including many severely malnourished children, emerged from the forests, where they fled to avoid being caught up in the factional violence. Hundreds of people are believed to have perished for lack of food and medicine.

The suffering did not go unnoticed. In an April 1998 meeting in Paris, international donors agreed to resume aid to Liberia, and NGOs raised awareness of, and funds for, Liberia. In September,

Liberia was listed among countries that might qualify for debt relief under the International Monetary Fund (IMF)/World Bank Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative,⁵ and Liberia received tens of millions of dollars of foreign assistance after its electoral transition to peace. In March 1999, the U.N. Development Program provided Liberia \$3.4 million for housing construction and a credit program for small business owners. Liberia remained highly indebted, however. In its Budget Justification for fiscal year 2001, USAID estimated Liberia's foreign debt at \$2.5 billion and domestic debt at \$124 million, and the country remained in arrears to the OAU (later superseded by the African Union, or AU) and to the U.N. by about \$10 million. In March 2000, Reuters reported that Liberia was one of eight OAU member debtor states sanctioned by the OAU; the governments of such countries may neither vote nor attend meetings until membership dues in arrears are paid. For the same reason, Liberia lost its voting rights in the U.N. General Assembly; its voting rights remained suspended as of late 2003.

Social Reintegration

The reintegration into society of former combatants, displaced people, and refugees proved to be a daunting task. By year 2000, at least 280,000 refugees had re-entered the country, and some 75,000 internally displaced persons had returned to their homes. Many Liberians, however, remained reluctant to return home, fearing ethnically based political violence. For some, conditions in foreign refugee camps remain preferable to those in Liberia, and many never returned home; at least 244,000 remained refugees in the West African sub-region in 2001, four years after the war.

The process of reintegrating ex-combatants into society following disarmament and demobilization also faced difficulties. On at least three separate occasions in May 1998, former soldiers staged violent demonstrations, demanding back pay and pension benefits, an issue that had been complicated by the issuance of falsified demobilization certificates. Ex-combatants also briefly took hostage several dozen government officials, all members of Taylor's National Patriotic Party, to highlight their assertion that the government had disbursed only a fraction of a \$3 million Taiwanese grant for demobilized troops. Taylor responded by stating that his government was working on a program that would benefit all ex-combatants, regardless of their former affiliation, that would include vocational training and rehabilitation for the disabled. Veterans, however, again demonstrated in August, 1999. Internally displaced persons (IDP) in Liberia called for assistance help; in April 1999, IDPs demonstrated for government resettlement support.

Liberia under Taylor

Economy

There were some early signs of incipient positive economic progress and growth in Liberia. Production and trade gradually increased, though moderately, and the U.N. Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) reported an overall improvement in the food situation as the country entered a post-conflict transition period.

Despite some improvements, much of the economy remained troubled, and early progress did not yield long-term or robust economic growth. Rebuilding of demolished infrastructure was

⁵ On debt reduction, HIPC, and development, see CRS Report RL30449, *Debt and Developing in Poor Countries: Rethinking Policy Responses*; CRS Report RL30214, *Debt Reduction: Initiatives for the Most Heavily Indebted Poor Countries*; IMF, *Debt Relief Under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative*, Factsheet, September 2003, [<http://www.imf.org/external/np/exr/facts/hipc.htm>]; and World Bank, *HIPC*, [<http://www.worldbank.org/hipc/>].

extremely limited, and public utilities (plumbing, sewage, and electricity) remained severely lacking, as did improvements in the provision of basic education and health care services. Civil servant salaries were often months in arrears. Key development challenges for Liberian development identified by USAID in its Budget Justification for fiscal year 2001 included high formal sector unemployment and illiteracy rates, with both rates in the range of 80%⁶; low revenue and productivity bases; substantial destruction of public and private institutions and facilities; negligible public utility services; massive corruption; low rates of access to primary health care; a 4.5% national HIV/AIDS infection rate, which was rising; and an annual population growth rate of 3.3%—a rate high enough to outweigh improvements in living standards.

Many publicly announced government plans to undertake economic and governance reforms did not materialize, and international policy experts and other observers grew increasingly concerned over a general lack of public sector transparency. Reports of sizable discrepancies between government budgets, revenues, and actual expenditures became increasingly common. Many government agencies received funding irregularly, and agency staffs often went unpaid for months at a time. In some instances, state agencies were able to operate only because of periodic patronage “donations” by members of the Taylor administration, or by foreign donations. Few state revenues were directed toward investment in public goods and services. Most public infrastructure remained severely degraded, and the provision of social services became sporadic, if such services were available at all.

Under Taylor, much of Liberia’s formal sector economy came to be dominated by commercial enterprises controlled by a relatively small group of politically powerful elites, often in association with international, grey-market business operators. Liberia’s domestic manufacturing and industrial production capacity remained marginal and unable to supply local demand, which necessitated the importation of most manufactured consumer products. Many imported goods, however, were sold at a high premium over their import costs. Fuel imports, for instance, were brokered by a single firm on behalf of the Liberian government; fuel was then sold to the public by a cartel of domestic distributors and retailers. Other commodities that were subject to total or partial monopolistic marketing practices and controlled pricing structures included rice and car imports, cement and beer sales and production, printing, and cocoa and coffee exports. Politically powerful elites also dominated the banking, fisheries, textile and construction, and communications industries.

Taylor reportedly held direct, personal shares in a number of private firms, but he was also said to have received off-the-books payments from private firms in exchange for business licenses and concession rights, as well as earnings cuts.⁷ In particular, numerous reports suggest that members of the Taylor administration controlled and diverted for their own uses significant amounts of revenue from the export of timber, which many observers alleged was routinely harvested in an environmentally destructive and unsustainable manner. State revenues earned from the “flags of convenience” merchant marine fleet fees and other operations of the U.S.-based Liberian International Ship & Corporate Registry comprised a second key source of revenues subject to alleged diversion by the Taylor administration. In a number of cases, revenue streams from the

⁶ Other sources report significantly lower illiteracy rates.

⁷ When Taylor entered exile in 2003, numerous press reports described how he had controlled Liberia’s economy—a goal that he continued to attempt to pursue. See, for instance, Edward Harris, “Ousted Liberian Leader Controlled a Financial Empire -and Isn’t Giving it Up, Diplomats Say,” Associated Press, September 7, 2003; Tim Weiner “Liberian Ex-Leader Stole \$3 Million as He Left, U.N. Aide Says,” *New York Times*, September 6, 2003; Terence Sesay, “UN’s Liberia Envoy Says Taylor Stole 3 Million Dollars Meant for Soldiers,” Agence France Presse, September 5, 2003; and Emily Wax, “In Exile, Taylor Exerts Control,” *Washington Post*, September 17, 2003.

timber exports and the ship registry reportedly funded arms purchases, and were increasingly used by the Taylor government to fund its military activities.⁸

Governance

Liberia is constitutionally a republic, and its government structure and constitution are modeled on that of the United States and on Anglo-American common law, although local indigenous customary law is widely used in rural areas. Despite the existence of constitutional checks and balances between the branches of government, control of political and administrative power has historically been dominated by a strong, centralized presidency. Under Taylor, concentrated executive power grew. State institutions that constitutionally or legally were meant to provide accountability and independent checks on the executive branch—including the judiciary, legislature, the National Human Rights Commission, and the National Reconciliation and Reunification Commission—wielded little effective authority. Courts were reportedly liable to executive branch influence, corrupt practices, and operational inefficiencies related to a lack of resources.

The legislature under Taylor was dominated by his National Patriotic Party, which held 49 of the 64 seats in the House of Representatives, and 21 of the 26 Senate seats. The legislature exercised little practical independence from the executive, although legislators were generally free to voice their sometimes strongly expressed views. In part, some opposition leaders and other critics allege, the legislature's weaknesses were a result of Mr. Taylor and his political allies' effective control of the majority of state revenue collections and expenditures, and its influence over or significant ownership interest in many major commercial operations. In this view, both NPP and opposition legislators, many local government leaders and their networks of supporters, including civil servants, joined or were coopted by the Taylor administration in exchange for civil service jobs, salaries, the use of vehicles and other state resources, and the expenditure of state resources in their constituencies. Similarly, businessmen relied on connections to key government figures to ensure their freedom to run commercial operations, and obtain natural resource extraction concessions, tax breaks and related advantages.

The Taylor administration exercised political authority through its control of public policy formation and implementation. While legal processes were nominally practiced, they were often subject to irregularities. Legislative and budget proposals were regularly promulgated, for instance, but often remained unratified or subject to other legal ambiguities and ad hoc presidential actions. The Strategic Commodities Act of 2001, for instance, was reportedly passed in 2001 and later ratified, but Liberian officials stated in late 2001 that it had not been signed into law. Despite uncertainties over the legal status of the Act—which granted the Executive sole power and negotiation rights over all commercial contracts or agreements related to the extraction of Liberia's natural resources—observers say that Taylor's backing of the Act had the de facto effect of putting it into practice.

⁸ See, *inter alia*, *Report of the Panel of Experts*, cited above, in United Nations Security Council document S/2003/498, April 24, 2003, and a series of earlier U.N. Liberia sanctions monitoring reports; and multiple Global Witness reports, particularly *Taylor-Made, The Pivotal Role of Liberia's Forests in Regional Conflict*, September 2001; —, *The Usual Suspects: Liberia's Weapons and Mercenaries in Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone; Why it's Still Possible, How it Works and How to Break the Trend*, March 2003; and —, *Logging Off: How the Liberian Timber Industry Fuels Liberia's Humanitarian Disaster and Threatens Sierra Leone*, September 2002.

Political Conditions under Taylor

Taylor was widely reported to have harbored deep suspicions and fears of diverse plots against him by foreign governments, and Liberian political opponents and rivals. He periodically voiced public statements warning of and against such alleged machinations, which in some cases gave birth to sometimes extended political contretemps. Taylor also exhibited autocratic, sometimes seemingly arbitrary, behavior that some observers saw as verging on megalomaniacal, particularly given Taylor's penchant for speaking of himself in the third person.⁹ Many observers, however, also described Taylor as well-read, articulate and persuasive, and possessed of a charismatic personality.

Some plots alleged by Taylor or his representatives seemed credible, particularly in light of several armed clashes between his supporters and members of former factions, and a series of raids in Lofa county in 1999 that in 2000 gave birth to the rebellion that ultimately toppled him in 2003 (see CRS report RS21525, *Liberia: Transition to Peace*). Others seemed far fetched, nevertheless led to the arrest of perceived opponents of Taylor, and several alleged political murders.¹⁰ Because of such incidents, many opposition politicians and clan chiefs fled Liberia to live in exile, despite Taylor's public extension of invitations to them to return to Liberia, accompanied by verbal assurances of their personal safety.

Security Affairs

Despite moderate post-war social and political progress, the security situation remained troubled, both with respect to institutional developments and with respect to public security and human rights.

Post-war national reconciliation was hampered by the new government's failure, according to its critics, to create an ethnically broad, politically inclusive, and smaller Liberian military, as required under the Abuja Accords. This failure was a source of considerable friction between the Taylor government and ECOMOG, which had been mandated with helping Liberia to undertake such post-conflict military reforms. While Taylor engaged ECOMOG on this issue, he apparently viewed ECOMOG primarily as a source of training expertise, rather than of organizational and policy reform advice, and did not see the objectives associated with Liberia's peace process as paramount. Taylor, citing sovereign self-defense concerns and lack of funds, delayed such restructuring. Instead, Taylor replaced personnel who left the army through attrition and mandated retirements with former NPFL fighters and other loyalists. Following persistent criticism, in late 2000 a commission with a mandate to downsize and restructure the army was reportedly created and allocated about \$100,000, but no further reforms resulted. Taylor also ensured that the national military did not pose a threat to his leadership, while simultaneously attempting to ensure that it remained loyal. Army troops exercised less authority than several other state security services (see below), and were ill paid and given fewer resources.

Taylor maintained a substantial personal and state security apparatus, which increasingly faced accusations of human rights abuses and corrupt, often violent behavior.¹¹ Formal military and

⁹ In May 1999, for instance, he reportedly summarily fired a large number of his cabinet ministers who failed to participate in 3 days of prayer and fasting, although most were reinstated the next day.

¹⁰ In August 2000, a pro-Taylor newspaper reported that the Liberian government had become aware of an American plot to destabilize Liberia and assassinate Charles Taylor, an accusation refuted by then-U.S. Ambassador Bismarck Myrick as "false and baseless." On several occasions, human rights activists and journalists were jailed for various plots or other alleged offenses against Taylor.

¹¹ See annual U.S. State Department human rights reports on Liberia and various reports by the International Crisis Group and by Global Witness, *inter alia*.

security forces under Taylor included the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL); the Liberia National Police (LNP), which focused on internal security; the Special Operations Division (SOD), a nominal LNP paramilitary unit closely controlled by Taylor; the Anti-Terrorist Unit (ATU), formerly called the Antiterrorist Brigade (ATB), an elite unit composed of former NPFL fighters and foreign mercenaries; the Special Security Service (SSS), an executive protective force; the Executive Mansion Special Security Unit (SSU); the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI); and the National Security Agency (NSA). These forces were bolstered by diverse special units and irregular militias, such as the Navy Rangers; Delta Force; Navy; Wild Geese; Man Moving Man Dropping; remnants of the Lofa Defense Force, a civil war faction; Demus Force; Jungle Lions; the Small Boys Unit; and Special Operation Strike Force. In addition, various government entities, and state-owned and firms, notably those controlling large timber concessions, also maintained armed security services. Both regular and irregular security units, which often included former members of Taylor's defunct NPFL, frequently operated autonomously and engaged in looting and extortion; many had serious human rights abuse records, notably in rural areas. Such units collaborated closely, sometimes effectively merging, particularly as armed opposition to Taylor grew in 2000 and subsequently.

Human Rights

President Taylor signed the country's first human rights bill and named former foe Alhaji Kromah head of a national reconciliation commission, but some critics contended that the government made few moves to identify and punish war crime perpetrators. Several events also raised questions about Taylor's commitment to human rights.¹²

In late 1997, authorities discovered in Gbarnga the remains of prominent opposition leader Samuel Dokie, a former Taylor ally, who left the NPFL in 1994 and later became associated with Johnson-Sirleaf's Unity Party. Dokie had been tortured and murdered, along with family members and a bodyguard. Three members of the SSS were arrested in the case, but were acquitted for lack of evidence in a February 1998 trial. Four other suspects reportedly fled the country. The United States and the EU publicly condemned the Dokie murders and the manner in which a subsequent murder trial was conducted.

In February 1998, the former faction leader, ethnic Krahn, and then-cabinet minister Roosevelt Johnson criticized Taylor, asserting that he had been building an army comprised entirely of heavily armed former NPFL fighters. One month later, three of Johnson's bodyguards were allegedly detained and flogged by members of Taylor's Special Security Service in what Johnson characterized as an attempted assassination attempt against himself. Johnson made similar claims in August. In September 1998, in a replay of an April 1996 confrontation that had touched off weeks of violence in Monrovia, Liberian government forces sought to arrest Johnson in his guarded compound. A gunfight resulted, causing hundreds of Monrovia residents to flee their homes. Johnson fled to the American embassy, outside of which gun fighting again erupted. He and his two sons then slipped unbidden through the open embassy gate, while Liberian security forces continued to fire at him, killing four Johnson supporters and wounding two U.S. embassy staff. Due to the high level of violence exhibited by the militiamen, U.S. diplomats refused to release Johnson into Liberian government custody, and a six-day standoff ensued. The Reverend Jesse Jackson accepted a request to attempt to negotiating a settlement. Nearly a week later, a Liberian government spokesman, though still demanding that Johnson be turned over to stand trial for crimes including murder, rape, treason, and kidnapping, stated that Monrovia would not prevent the United States from flying Johnson out of Liberia. Many aid workers left during the fighting,

¹² Agence France-Presse, "Diplomats Concerned over Human Rights Violations in Liberia," January 5, 1998.

and thousands of ethnic Krahn fled to Côte d'Ivoire, reversing the prior flow of refugees returning to Liberia.

The United States closed its embassy after the incident and demanded an investigation of the shooting, an apology, and a guarantee of the mission's security from the Taylor government. After an initial refusal, the Liberian government offered an official apology on November 14, and the embassy reopened. Johnson later claimed that hundreds of people were massacred during the gun battle at his home. The Taylor government countered that "no more than 50 or 60" had died. During the raid on the Johnson compound, Liberian forces took into custody dozens of ethnic Krahn. In April, after the lengthy trial for treason of 32 individuals, 13 people were sentenced to 10 years in prison. Washington and other foreign governments closely monitored the trial. In December, Johnson was added to the list of those guilty of treason, and he and several other faction leaders were tried in absentia. During a November 1998 visit to Monrovia, then-U.S. Deputy Assistant of State for African Affairs Vicki Huddleston, stated that a "transition to democracy requires human rights, rule of law, and this is lacking in Liberia..."¹³ Huddleston's comment reflected many similar observations by diverse international and Liberian observers.

Press Restrictions

Taylor and his supporters periodically voiced concern over media coverage of the Taylor administration, particularly regarding coverage of alleged human rights abuses by state agents, and journalists were subjected to intimidation by state security agents.¹⁴ In January 1998, the government announced, without an immediate explanation, that it was closing the independent newspaper *Heritage*, which had published articles critical of Liberia's relations with ECOMOG. The office of the newspaper's printing contractor was also raided, and the publisher was accused of supporting coup plotters. Also in January 1998, the government closed Star Radio, a USAID-supported station also supported by several European governments and, on January 14, briefly shut down Radio Monrovia, which carried the Voice of America. The government attributed the Star Radio shutdown to a dispute with the station over a fine levied for the unauthorized transferral of frequencies. Many saw these events as undermining Liberia's progress toward democracy; in January, a coalition of diplomats in Monrovia issued a statement expressing concern over human rights violations.

In mid-March 2000, the Liberian government shut down Radio Veritas, operated by the Catholic church, and Star Radio, citing, a "security threat created by agents provocateurs using the news media to abuse the unprecedented freedom of speech and press now prevailing in the country," according to the U.S. Department of State. The stations had aired listener comments critical of the Taylor government. The closure was protested by the U.S. government, Amnesty International, and Liberian journalists. Radio Veritas was later allowed to resume broadcasting, provided it limit itself to religious programs, a restriction rejected by Archbishop Michael Kpakala Francis (recipient of the 1999 Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award). On July 20, 2000, the government ordered Star Radio, which had been off the air since the March closure, to dismantle its equipment.

¹³ Reuters, "Liberia's Sirleaf Says She Named in Treason Charge," November 4, 1998; Panafrican News Agency, "Washington Unimpressed with Rule of Law in Liberia," November 4, 1998.

¹⁴ See, for instance, Agence France-Presse, "Journalists Might Have to Die, Warns Liberian Security Force: Claim," December 12, 1997; Reuters, "Detained Liberia Reporter Says Police Tortured Him," December 25, 1997; Reuters, "Liberia Drops Treason Charge Against Journalist," December 29, 1997; and Tim Sullivan, "Liberian Warlord Becomes President and Keeps Some Old Habits," Associated Press, February 15, 1998.

U.S.-Liberian Relations

Background: Historical U.S.-Liberian Ties

American Colonization Society

The United States has a lengthy historical relationship with Liberia dating from 1821, when groups of African Americans established settlements in Liberia with the assistance of the American Colonization Society (ACS). The ACS was formed in 1816 by a diverse group of white abolitionists; supporters of slavery; opponents of racial integration and the growth of a population of free blacks in the United States; and clergy who wanted to spread Christianity to Africa. The ACS sought to settle in Africa persons of African descent from the New World, both freeborn and freed slaves, as an alternative to their emancipation and assimilation in the United States. Some historians have suggested that the ACS was essentially a racist organization.

African American settlers became known as Americo-Liberians, while persons from the Caribbean and slaves liberated from slave ships and resettled in Liberia became known as Congos. In 1842, Joseph Jenkins Roberts, a settler from the U.S. state of Virginia who had served as sheriff and lieutenant governor of the colony, became its first non-white governor. In 1847, following a settler referendum, the colony's legislature declared the territory an independent, free republic, the first on the African continent. Naming the new country Liberia, it elected Roberts as its first president. Liberia modeled its constitution after that of the United States, named the capital of Liberia, Monrovia, after the fifth U.S. President, and chose a flag similar to that of the United States.

After the creation of the republic, a two-party political system developed in which the sole participants were Americo-Liberians, who held a near monopoly on political and economic power in Liberia until 1980. In the latter half of the 1800s and early 1900s, the republic's government gradually extended its authority over the indigenous ethnic groups, confederations, and small clan or village-based societies of Liberia's interior. Such efforts sought to expand the areas under the government's control and impose over such territory a system of centralized administrative rule, taxation, and codified law. These efforts were pursued by the establishment of a system of "indirect rule" as well as the imposition of direct central governance, often underpinned by the use of military force. Under indirect rule, the central government sought to co-opt indigenous political structures by entering into alliances with confederations of indigenous groups. It created a system of decentralized authority presided over by nominally "traditional" local chiefs who were, however, elected or appointed by the government. Such actions sought to impose central government rule, suppress indigenous uprisings and external interference in Liberia, and collect taxes, but generated indigenous grievances, causing several small wars between the government and indigenous polities. To deal with such rebellions, the Liberian Frontier Force (LFF) was formed in 1908. The force was irregularly paid, ill-trained and often unpaid, and it engaged in looting and violent predations against the indigenous population. The LFF was at first commanded by British officers, who recruited many Sierra Leoneans into its ranks and later, beginning in 1912, by U.S. soldiers. This action continued a pattern of U.S. support for the Liberian government, which included periodic interventions on its behalf in response to political disagreements and armed conflicts between it and the indigenous population. Such undertakings both bolstered Americo-Liberian rule and discouraged external, particularly French, colonial designs on the small country, contributing to Liberia's continuing independence during a period when all other African countries, except for Ethiopia, became subject to European colonialism.

Firestone

In 1926, the U.S. Firestone company, in the face of high rubber prices spurred by the growing demands of the auto industry and the predominance of British interests in global rubber production, signed contracts with the Liberian government—with the assistance of the U.S. State Department—that gave the firm a 99-year lease concession to create a one million-acre rubber plantation. The deal, which involved the take-over of a small 99-acre British-operated rubber plantation and the extension of credit by Firestone to the Liberian government, led to the creation of the world's largest rubber plantation.

League of Nations Inquiry

Liberian-U.S. relations underwent strains in the late 1920s and early 1930s. A League of Nations inquiry found that the Liberian government, in many cases through the use of coercion carried out by the LFF, was forcing indigenous Liberians to engage indentured and forced labor in support of public works projects, and on plantations in what later became Equatorial Guinea. The United States criticized the Liberian government, and called for a commission of inquiry and the implementation of reforms to end such labor abuses.

World War II

U.S.-Liberian relations deepened as a result of World War II and the continuing commercial linkages represented by the Firestone rubber plantation. Pan Am Airlines began service in 1941 to Liberia to and from Lake Piso, with flights of “Clippers”—planes that took off and landed on water.¹⁵ During World War II., Pan Am's presence in Liberia centered on the provision of services in support of U.S. military operations.

Following the signing of the Friendship, Commerce, and Navigation Agreement between the United States and Liberia in 1938, Robertsfield International Airport (RIA) was constructed in 1942. RIA, which long had one of Africa's longest runways, served as a U.S. military cargo relay point and refueling station, as well as a transportation hub for the rubber plantation. It was used to support U.S. military campaigns in North Africa and the Far East. A force of about 5000 predominantly African-American medical personnel, engineering and combat troops, and air crews were based in Liberia to support these operations, as well as to carry out U.S. Army Air Corps anti-submarine sea plane patrols along the Liberian coast. During the war, Liberia adopted the US dollar as its official currency. After the United States entered World War II, it signed a bilateral accord with Liberia, called the Defense Areas Agreement, that permitted U.S. construction, operation, and control of bases in Liberia, and defense of these and other U.S. interests there. Between 1942 and 1947, the Freeport of Monrovia, designed as a major shipping transfer, storage, and duty-free processing zone, was constructed under U.S. Lend-Lease Administration agreements.

Cold War

Liberia was among the African countries with the closest ties to the United States in the 1950s through the mid-1970s, in part because of Liberian support for U.S. objectives related to the Cold War during that period. Several defense cooperation pacts were signed in the 1950s, and the U.S. Peace Corps was present in Liberia from 1962 to 1990; during that period, 4,281 volunteers served in Liberia. The Voice of America began construction of facilities in Liberia in 1961, and began broadcasting from Liberia in December 1962 to all of Africa, southern Europe, and

¹⁵ Pan Am serviced Liberia from 1942 to 1987, when air service was canceled because of low profitability.

elsewhere. It maintained transmitter and repeater installations there until 1990, when the main site was over-run by combatants in the fighting, and was subsequently looted and stripped of its assets.

1970s

In April, 1973, the United States and Liberia signed an agreement allowing the construction in Liberia of one of several Omega Navigational Stations that made up a global network of beacons that emitted signals for ship and aircraft guidance. The facility also served as a back-up system for guidance of U.S. nuclear submarines. The system was installed in the mid-1970s.

A brief period of U.S.-Liberian tensions characterized the mid to late-1970s, during the administration of William R. Tolbert, who came to power in 1971, after the death of his autocratic predecessor, William Tubman. Tolbert promoted Africa-centric cultural values and Pan-Africanist political views, and sought to increase popular participation in government, end indigenous-American-Liberian divisions, and ameliorate poverty. His administration negotiated better terms for Liberia with multi-national firms, including Firestone; sought closer relations with the Soviet bloc and non-aligned movement; and refused U.S. access to Robertsfield International Airport for a U.S. Rapid Deployment Force, a small, mobile contingency force. These and other policies, such as his cutting of ties with Israel, alienated the United States.

Tolbert also promoted populist economic policies, such as the lowering of the price of rice and ending a monopoly on rice imports. As the 1970s progressed, a global recession in the wake of the petroleum crisis grew deeper, commodity prices for Liberia's primary exports dropped, and his policies faced increasing difficulties. Tolbert's promises of reform had produced rising economic expectations, but these were not met, and popular disillusion with his administration grew. Unemployment rose, and Tolbert's administration was increasingly beset by nepotism and corruption. His policies also faced political opposition; they were viewed as too radical by the powerful elite establishment, and too cautious by radical student-led reformers. In 1979, popular opposition to Tolbert crystalized when the government proposed marketing and production reforms that would have caused an increase in the price of rice. The proposed policy—and the perception that businesses associated with the governing elite would benefit from a rise rice prices—engendered protests, and riots and looting of food ensued. The government responded by arresting radical student leaders and suppressing opposition to its policies.

Bilateral Ties under the Reagan Administration

In April 1980, Tolbert was toppled and killed in a violent military coup led by Master Sergeant Samuel K. Doe (see above). Despite this undemocratic beginning, U.S.-Liberian ties warmed during the first half of the 1980s, in large part due to Liberia's support of U.S. foreign policy goals, but also because of long standing U.S.-Liberian historical ties and the various strategic communications and other facilities that the United States had constructed in Liberia. In August, 1982 President Reagan met with Doe at the White House and paid tribute to 120 years of U.S.-Liberian diplomatic relations, praising the two countries' "special friendship," "firm bond," and "long history of cooperation," which he said would be "further strengthened."¹⁶ In the years that followed, Liberia initiated relations with Israel, causing the Libyan government to freeze ties with Liberia, and Liberia to expel Libyan representatives. Doe also expelled the Soviet ambassador to Liberia. In 1983, Liberia and the United States signed the bilateral Defense Facilities Agreement,

¹⁶ Public Papers of the Presidents, "Meeting With Samuel K. Doe, Head of State of Liberia," *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, August 17, 1982.

which permitted U.S. access rights to RIA on very short notice. These developments were accompanied by a rapid increase in U.S. assistance and cooperation. From 1980 to 1985, according to the *New York Times*, Liberia was the largest sub-Saharan Africa per-capita recipient of U.S. aid.¹⁷ A U.S. diplomatic communications facility that processed U.S. communications and radio traffic between U.S. diplomatic and intelligence posts in Africa and the United States operated in Liberia.¹⁸ In 1985, Doe won a rigged election, but his victory was not viewed critically by the U.S. administration.¹⁹

The trend toward greater U.S. cooperation with Liberia subsequently waned. The end of the Cold War and U.S. disillusionment with increasing corruption and dictatorial tendencies under Doe during the latter half of his regime, in the mid to late-1980s, led to a gradual decline in U.S. assistance, and a trend toward decreasing U.S. engagement with Liberia. In 1985, following U.S. remarks critical of the Doe government's human rights record, Doe began to open lines of communication with Libya, where he traveled in 1988. In 1985, U.S. assistance to Liberia reached its highest annual level, \$69.1 million. In 1986 and 1987, the United States suspended bilateral aid to Liberia following Liberia's failure to make credit payments due to the International Monetary Fund, which also halted assistance to Liberia.²⁰

Civil War, 1989-1997

As Liberia's civil war burgeoned after its inception in December 1989, many Liberians, hoping for a U.S. intervention, were dismayed that the United States did not intercede. Americans were soon evacuated from Liberia and hopes for a U.S. peacekeeping force were dashed. Former Assistant Secretary of State for Africa Herman Cohen has written that he and other State Department and other agency Africa specialists supported significant U.S. engagement in Liberia to protect U.S. facilities and pursue a resolution of the conflict, in addition to evacuating U.S. citizens from the country. Higher-level decision makers, however, did not share these goals and saw little need for a U.S. role in Liberia, according to Cohen.²¹

Following the deterioration of socio-economic and political conditions under Doe and the subsequent civil conflict, which resulted in a waning of the U.S. official presence in Liberia, some policy makers began to view Liberia as simply one more country in a continent that they saw as generally peripheral to U.S. interests. From this perspective, Liberia was worthy of no special U.S. attention or engagement, and a basic position of non-interference in Liberian internal affairs was an appropriate guiding principle for U.S. policy. Others believed that the historically close relationship between the United States and Liberia obligated the former to take special responsibility in answering Liberia's humanitarian and developmental needs, helping to promote a democratic system, and working to stop human rights abuses. Some criticized the U.S. response to the Liberian conflict as inadequate, believing that it would have been appropriate for the United States to have sent in troops at various stages of the conflict to help restore order and

¹⁷ James Brooke, "Mission to Liberia Evidently Fails," *New York Times*, December 5, 1988.

¹⁸ Nancee Oku Bright, *Liberia: America's Stepchild*, transcript of PBS documentary, October 10, 2002.

¹⁹ Herman Cohen, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, 1989—1993, has stated that "[Doe] should have lost, but he rigged the election. But at that time all West African elections were rigged. It was a very normal thing to do, for the government to win the election even though they had less than the majority of the vote. So it did not trouble us at all." See Oku Bright, *Liberia: America's Stepchild*. See also David B. Ottaway, "Shultz Sees Liberian Doe, Cites 'Genuine Progress'," *Washington Post*, January 15, 1987, *inter alia*.

²⁰ See Ottaway, "Shultz Sees Liberian..."

²¹ Herman Cohen, "Liberia: A Bold Plan Hijacked," *Intervening in Africa: Superpower Peacemaking in a Troubled Continent*, 2000; and Oku Bright, "Liberia..."

protect civilians. They pointed to Haiti, Bosnia, and Kosovo as recent examples of successful humanitarian interventions, and asked why similar levels of assistance were not appropriate for an African country with historic U.S. ties.

As the conflict continued, U.S. involvement in Liberia centered on ensuring the delivery of emergency humanitarian assistance to the Liberian people, providing technical and logistical support to the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), and supporting ECOWAS and U.N. mediational efforts to end the war. From FY1991 to FY2003, no military aid was provided to Liberia; U.S. assistance consisted predominantly of food aid and relatively small U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) loans and grants.²²

Table I. U.S. Assistance to Liberia: FY1990-FY2001

(\$ millions)

Year	DA	ESF	FFP	IMET	Peace Corps	Other Economic Assistance	Annual Total
1990	0	0	14.5	0.4	1.9	0.2	17
1991	0	0	43.5	0	0	0	43.5
1992	0	1.3	35.4	0	0	0	36.7
1993	0	0	50.6	0	0	0	50.6
1994	3.7	0	56.4	0	0	0	60.1
1995	0	0	51.6	0	0	0	51.6
1996	2.3	0	55.7	0	0	0	57.9
1997	12.5	1.7	23.1	0	0	0	37.3
1998	10.8	1.4	30.3	0	0	0	42.5
1999	7.1	0.5	16.8	0	0	0	24.5
2000	8.9	0	4.2	0	0	0	13.1
2001	5.7	0	4	0	0	0	9.7
Totals by Function	51	4.9	386.1	0.4	1.9	0.2	444.5

Abbreviations: DA: Development Assistance (USAID grants); ESF: Economic Support Fund; FFP: Food for Peace—P.L. 480 Title II -Food Aid and Section 416 Program; IMET=International Military Education and Training.

Data Source: U.S. Agency for International Development, *U.S. Overseas Loans & Grants Online* [a.k.a. *Greenbook*], [<http://quesdb.cdie.org/gbk/index.html>]. Data as of December 19, 2003.

Note: For background on U.S. assistance to Africa, see CRS Issue Brief IB95052, *Africa: U.S. Foreign Assistance Issues*. USAID's *Greenbook* is among the most comprehensive sources of historical data on U.S. foreign assistance. It provides data on assistance by functional category, as obligated during a given year. Calculations of annual assistance figures from other sources, such as data on annual appropriations or recent actual expenditures in agencies' annual budget requests, may differ from the figures listed above.

In strife-torn Monrovia in 1996, USAID delivered water to Liberian refugees sheltering in the U.S. embassy's Greystone compound and sought to bring food into the city by helicopter. USAID coordinated its relief efforts with multi-lateral government agencies and NGOs. As peace

²² Historical data on U.S. assistance to Liberia is available online from the USAID publication *Overseas Loans and Grants, Obligations and Loan Authorizations July 1, 1945 -September 30, 2001*. An online version of this resource, *U.S. Overseas Loans & Grants Online* [*Greenbook*], is available. See [<http://quesdb.cdie.org/gbk/index.html>].

gradually took hold in 1997, U.S. policy-making attention shifted toward the need for its further consolidation, particularly through support for transitional security maintenance and electoral assistance. In June 1997 the House International Relations Subcommittee on Africa held a hearing entitled *The Liberian Election: A New Hope?*, during which U.S. Special Envoy to Liberia Howard Jeter reviewed recent developments in Liberia. He emphasized the centrality in U.S. policy toward Liberia of U.S. political, financial, and technical support for ECOMOG, beginning in mid-1996. He also expressed strong U.S. support for ECOWAS' effort to ensure "free, fair and credible elections in Liberia," and reviewed an agenda for then-forthcoming U.S. electoral assistance for Liberia.

Table 2. U.S. Support for ECOMOG in Liberia, 1991-1998

(\$ millions, fiscal years)

Account	1991	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
PKO (a)	3.8	6.83	6.69	5.7	12		2.844
ESF (b)	—	13	1	0	8.6	1.5	
Drawdown (c)	10	—	—	—	15	—	—
Totals	13.8	19.83	7.69	5.7	35.6	1.5	2.844

Source: State Department, "Multi-Year Assistance for ECOMOG Peacekeeping Operations," information sheet.

- a. PKO: Peacekeeping Operations Account
- b. ESF: Economic Support Fund
- c. Drawdown: Provision of equipment from U.S. Defense Department stockpiles, sometimes using existing government service contracts or agencies.

UNOMIL

Another important facet of U.S. policy toward Liberia during the war was its support for the United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL, which existed from September 1993 to September 1997). UNOMIL was charged with monitoring compliance with cease-fire agreements and a ban on arms shipments to Liberia, and the cantonment, disarmament and demobilization of combatants; observing and verifying the election process; training ECOMOG engineers in land mine clearance; and assisting in the coordination of humanitarian aid.

Table 3. U.S. Support for UNOMIL

(\$ Millions)

1994	1995	1996	1997
12.25	4	6	6

Source: Budget of the United States, various years.

Post-War Period

Following Taylor's election in 1997, the U.S. government sought to establish a dialogue with Liberia on key bilateral issues, particularly the observation of human rights and the strengthening of democracy and economic development in Liberia.

In 1998, the Carter Center began implementation of a USAID-funded democracy and governance program that sought to strengthen civil society, enhance the capacities of non-governmental organizations and the independent media, and institutionalize respect for human rights and government accountability.²³ Beginning in 1991, the Carter Center participated in mediation efforts that sought to end the war. In 1992, it established an office in Monrovia, which initiated human rights protection programs, assisted diverse Liberia non-governmental organizations, and worked to create a democratic electoral process. The Center's office, which closed in April 1996 due to fighting, had re-opened in April 1997, as the war drew to a close, and as preparations for elections commenced.

Initial optimism for political and economic rebuilding and reconciliation gave way to pessimism about Liberia's prospects. Monrovia's war-devastated public infrastructure remained largely unrepaired, and the Taylor government showed few signs of investing in public goods. Its poor human rights record and reported support of the RUF, which the United States repeatedly condemned, undercut prospects for improved bilateral relations between the Taylor Administration and the United States. As political and economic conditions in Liberia under Taylor gradually degenerated, U.S. policy makers' views of the Taylor Administration became increasingly negative and critical. U.S. assistance levels reflected such concerns; in 1997, as prospects for post-conflict rebuilding improved, U.S. assistance increased substantially, though at a moderate level by global comparison, but then steadily decreased. See **Table 1**, *U.S. Assistance to Liberia: FY1990 -FY2001*.

In late June 1999, the United States temporarily closed six embassies in Africa—including the U.S. mission in Monrovia, which reopened several days later—due to possible threats from Islamic militants. Britain did likewise for four of its embassies in Africa during the same period. Shortly thereafter, the then-newly re-established Liberian Anti-terrorist Unit (ATU) was deployed near the U.S. embassy in Monrovia, despite U.S. assertions that the embassy situation was secure and that the situation did “not warrant” the ATU deployment.²⁴

Recent U.S. Policy

Bilateral Relations, 2000-2003

As bilateral relations deteriorated in response to developments in Liberia that conflicted with stated U.S. policy goals toward Liberia, a strategic dilemma facing U.S. policy makers was whether to engage Liberia diplomatically and provide it with assistance in order to encourage socio-economic and political improvements or to pursue a more hard-line policy of regime isolation and containment, and to withhold development assistance.²⁵ The first option held the potential to engender governance and economic reforms and decrease human suffering, but held the potential to reward the Taylor government with increased legitimacy, and offset the impact of punitive or proscriptive sanctions against it. The second option held the potential to curtail the Taylor government's regionally destabilizing activities, but also to prompt it to take a defensive posture, lash out at perceived domestic opponents and reformers, and reduce U.S. leverage with

²³ The Carter Center, a private, nonpartisan organization, run by former President Jimmy Carter and his wife, Rosslyn, engages in conflict prevention and resolution, democracy-building, and health-related initiatives world-wide.

²⁴ U.S. State Department, Noon Briefing, June 25, 1999; Attes Johnson, “Liberia Deploys Anti-terror Unit near Us Embassy,” Reuters, July 1, 1999; PANA, “Liberia Deploys Troops at Us Embassy,” June 30, 1999; and Radio Liberia International, Monrovia, “‘Anti-Terrorist Unit’ Deployed to Improve Security,” via BBC Monitoring Africa -Political, June 30, 1999.

²⁵ Basic U.S. policy goals toward Liberia are articulated in the annual budget requests of the State Department and USAID.

the regime. Beginning under the Clinton Administration, and later under the Bush Administration, U.S. policy toward Liberia appeared to join aspects of both options, but increasingly emphasized the latter.

The Clinton Administration threatened to take punitive actions against the Taylor government in response to Liberian intervention in Sierra Leone's civil war, which also resulted in congressional calls for tough, activist U.S. policy measures to counter such alleged actions. In a May 12, 2000 opinion editorial in the *Washington Post*, for instance, Senator Judd Gregg stated that "Taylor and his criminal gang must go; every feasible effort ought to be made to undermine his rule."²⁶ On October 10, 2000, then-President Clinton issued a proclamation denying entry into the United States of persons assisting or profiting from the armed activities of the RUF rebels then fighting the government of Sierra Leone. In a related statement, he declared that the restrictions were to apply immediately to President Taylor, senior members of the Liberian government, and their supporters and families. He stated that the action represented an explicit sanction against the Liberian government for its failure to end its trafficking in arms and illicit diamonds with the RUF, thus fueling the Sierra Leonean conflict.²⁷ As a precaution against possible "anti-American sentiment in Liberia" as a result of the travel ban, the U.S. State Department ordered non-emergency embassy staff in Monrovia to depart Liberia, and issued a general travel advisory for Liberia.²⁸ The Liberian government responded with a reciprocal visa ban prohibiting U.S. officials and family members from traveling to Liberia.

Relations continued to deteriorate. In mid-October 2000, Taylor reportedly accused the U.S. government of conducting covert intelligence activities to undermine his rule by funding development projects through the Ambassador's Special Self-Help Fund. He also accused the United States of undermining Liberia's economic development by failing to fund infrastructure projects, an assertion that he had voiced in the past.²⁹ On November 2, 2000, the State Department issued a travel advisory against travel in Liberia, particularly in the northwest border region, due to rebel activity in the area. It also terminated an earlier ordered departure of non-emergency U.S. embassy staff from Liberia, but prohibited family members from accompanying U.S. government employees in Liberia. In early November 2000, the Carter Center announced the closure of its Monrovia field office, stating in a letter to the Liberian government that "prevailing conditions and the actions of your government have made it increasingly difficult for the Center and others to be effective in supporting democracy, human rights, and the rule of law."³⁰

U.S. policy makers in the Bush Administration, and some members of Congress, continued to view the Taylor regime critically. During a March 14, 2001 hearing of the House International Relations Committee Subcommittee on Africa, subcommittee members and witnesses criticized the Taylor government harshly, calling his government a regional menace and source of destabilization, an abuser of human rights, and anti-democratic.³¹

²⁶ Judd Gregg, "A Graveyard Peace," Op-Ed, *Washington Post*, May 9, 2000.

²⁷ U.S. State Department, "Clinton Proclamation Regarding Sierra Leone," October 11, 2000, Washington; White House Office of the Press Secretary, "Statement by the President," October 11, 2000.

²⁸ U.S. State Department, Noon Briefing, October 11, 2000.

²⁹ The News (Monrovia), "Taylor Accuses US of Sabotage," via All Africa, October 16, 2000; The News (Monrovia), "American Ambassador Speaks Out On Aid Issue," via AllAfrica, October 23, 2000; and Tom Kamara, "Living with Paranoia," *The Perspective*, October 25, 2000.

³⁰ Carter Center, "Carter Center Shuts Down Liberia Operation," November 7, 2000.

³¹ House of Representatives, U.S. Congress, *Confronting Liberia* [hearing], Subcommittee on Africa, Committee on International Relations, 107th Congress, 1st Session, March 14, 2001.

Under the Bush Administration, the United States continued to back U.N. sanctions against the Taylor government, support the maintenance of congruent U.S. bilateral sanctions, and provide humanitarian and civil society capacity-building assistance to Liberia. Several inter-Liberian conflict resolution and political party consultative forums received U.S. assistance or were addressed by U.S. officials. In FY2001, the Guinean military received U.S. training intended, in part, to counter Liberian-sponsored regional destabilization by improving Guinea's territorial defense and humanitarian relief/refugee protection capabilities. The United States was a key founding member of the International Contact Group on Liberia, a coalition of donor and West African regional governments formed in September 2002 by key donor and regional states to coordinate a comprehensive, regionally-focused resolution to the recently concluded, second civil war that burgeoned beginning in 2000.³²

³² More recent events in Liberia and U.S-Liberian relations are covered in CRS Report RS21525, *Liberia: Transition to Peace*.



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